

THIS REPORT CONTAINS ASSESSMENTS OF COMMODITY AND TRADE ISSUES MADE BY USDA STAFF AND NOT NECESSARILY STATEMENTS OF OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Required Report - public distribution

Date: 7/23/2012

GAIN Report Number: VE1207

Venezuela

Agricultural Biotechnology Annual

Biotechnology

Approved By:

David W. Cottrell

Prepared By:

Jonathan Martinez

Report Highlights:

Interest expressed by farmers and research being done by scientists to improve agricultural output and the environment via biotechnology has not resulted in a legal framework for either testing or commercialization, holding down domestic output and import potential. Most research done involves molecular genetics. Many projects have been halted since 2006 and no change in this situation is expected in the short term.

Section I. Executive Summary:

Biotechnology in Venezuela is at a crossroads. Despite interest in biotechnology by Venezuelan researchers and farmers to meet growing food demand and protect the environment, the lack of implementing regulations hinders commercial adoption, technological progress, and trade. Domestic laws provide a potential basic legal framework for agricultural biotechnology, but the regulatory system is currently imprecise. The current Venezuelan government (GBRV) opposes the marketing or development of biotech products but some universities continue to do research and development despite

the challenges.

Section II. Plant Biotechnology Trade and Production:

There are no commercial biotechnology crops under development in Venezuela, and the GBRV has not granted approval for planting biotechnology crops from any source. There is significant interest by research centers and universities in developing biotechnology. The majority of biotechnology research is in fact molecular genetics, as well as diagnostics of animal viral diseases. The research is mainly done by government institutions and universities, with minimal private sector involvement.

Section III. Plant Biotechnology Policy:

Agricultural biotechnology is the responsibility of Venezuela's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN). MARN's "Dirección de Bioseguridad y Biocomercio" is in charge of administering and regulating genetic resources, biotechnology security, and encouraging related activities that enhance the use of biodiversity. Among the specific functions of this office are:

- Evaluate all issues related to biotechnology security as well as traditional knowledge associated to biological diversity
- Coordinate activities of the access committee of genetic resources.
- Issue genetic resource access contracts

As noted above, work done in Venezuela to date is not specifically gene insertion or modifications, as there are no laws that permit it.

Section IV. Plant Biotechnology Marketing Issues:

Despite the government's reluctance to allow marketing or development of biotech, Venezuelan agricultural producers continue to express their need for and acceptance of biotech products. The Federation of Agricultural Producers forecasts that domestic production could double in two years if the regulatory framework for biotech would establish the free use of biotech seeds. Other producer groups have criticized the government for not allowing the use of agricultural biotechnology to the detriment of domestic production. Consumers have not voiced any significant concerns about biotechnology or products containing biotechnology raw materials.

Section V. Plant Biotechnology Capacity Building and Outreach:

There are no U.S. government funded capacity building or outreach activities conducted in Venezuela that relate to agricultural biotechnology. In 2005, the United Nations Environmental Program allocated funds to increase public awareness of agricultural biotech and have a consensus among the public and private sector regarding the national biotechnology framework.

Section VI. Animal Biotechnology:

There are no animal biotechnology events under development in Venezuela, and the government has not granted approval for animal biotechnology from any source. There is significant interest by research centers and universities in developing biotechnology. The use of animal biotechnology techniques is less developed; use has been restricted almost exclusively to the diagnosis of diseases, mainly viral in nature.

Section VII. Author Defined:

National and International Regulations Related To Biological Diversity, Subscribed And Approved By Venezuela

- Convention for the Protection of Flora, Fauna and Natural Scenic Beauties of America (October 12th, 1940, Washington D.C., United States).
- Convention concerning Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Habitat of Aquatic Birds (February 2nd, 1971 Ramsar, Iran).
- Biodiversity Agreement. Plant Variety (Cartagena Agreement), Decision, 21/10/1993, No. 345. Common Provisions on the Protection of the Rights of Breeders of New Plant Varieties
- Biological Diversity Law – Venezuelan Official Gazette Nr. 5.468, dated May 24, 2000.